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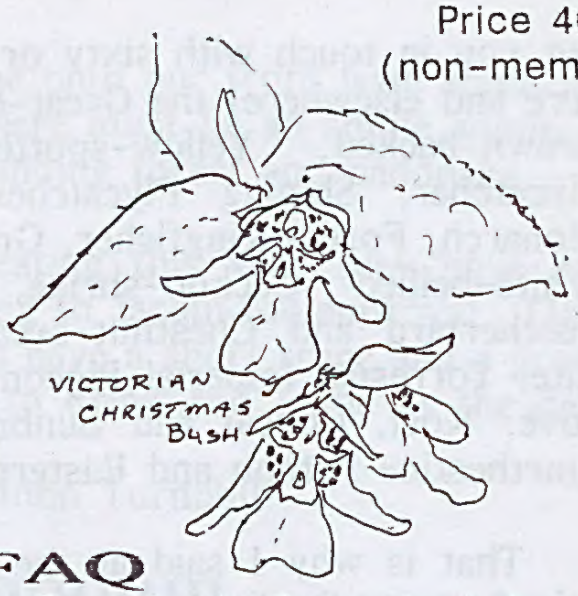

FNQ = FAQ

There is not much wilderness left; Far North Queensland is an example of "somewhere once special, now in the throes of being loved to death" by business and tourism. The 'burbs of Cairns spread out like any other city, with supermarkets and motels all the way until the cane fields take over, displacing the natural vegetation until wilderness seems as far away as ever.

Still heading north and the resort world of Port Douglas intrudes. Mossman looks a bit more natural, but it's not until you get to Daintree, and the end of the bitumen, that escape seems possible. You reach the ferry and cross into the tropical rainforest on the road to Cape Tribulation. Yes, it's touristy - and commercial - with tour coaches, safari wagons, caravans, rented 4WD's, guided-tour operators and the family car all pounding up the road, but at the same time theres's lots of well designed and informative walks into the forest, while the accommodation lodges are often hidden away to take advantage of the natural diversity of the coastal rainforest.

Such a place is "Crocodylus", a village hideaway rather than a resort, with something like fourteen distinct canvas/timber hostel and ensuite cabins tucked away out of sight in the forest, joined by paths to the reception-bar, kitchens and open-sided dining area. The whole complex covers acres but only 5 trees were cut down to build it, leaving huge old Mahogany trees stretching through the roof to the forest canopy above.

Here you find trees overlooked by the timber cutters; Red Cedar, Carabeen, Pender, Candlenut, Satin Ash, Zamia Palm, Native Kapok, Flame Tree, Turpentine, Picabeen, Black Bean, Silky Oak, Milkwood, and the Strangler Fig-tree. There is so much diversity it's impossible to figure it out while avoiding Lawyer Vines and the Gympie Stinging tree.

In the forest it's hard to separate the birdlife but a specialist river tour on the Daintree in the early morning with a knowledgable guide will

put you in touch with sixty or so sightings including (in our case both here and elsewhere) the Great-billled Heron, Dusky, McLeays, Graceful, Brown-backed, Yellow-spotted and Scarlet Honeyeaters, Satin Flycatcher, Shining Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Spectacled Monarch, Forest Kingfisher, Grey Whistler, Victoria's Riflebird, Catbird, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Cicadabird, Pacific Swallow, Black Butcherbird and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Pacific Baza, Brahminy Kite, Torresian Imperial-Pigeon, Woompoo Fruit Dove, Brown Cuckoo-dove, Koel, Coucal and Sunbird. Oh! not to forget the non-flying Amethestine Python and Eastern Water Dragon.

That is why I said at the beginning that Far North Queensland is Fair Average Quality - but going fast.

Chris Morris

Babblings From Barkers Creek, #7

Duelling Banjos

Recently, when Jacqui and I were in our rear garden late one afternoon we were surprised to hear a Rufous Whistler burst forth with a wonderful on-going display of his full range of whistling, only to be joined minutes later by a female. Then, to our great surprise, a second male commenced his repertoire in order to stake his claim for this available female. And then the "duelling banjos" began. For the next ten minutes or so the two males duelled for the lady's attention by trying to outdo each other with their respective full range of whistles. We assumed that at the end of the challenge she made her decision for we noticed one of the males being chased away by the successful suitor.

Masked Lapwings

One morning last week while standing on our front lawn I was joined by a male lapwing who was calling regularly and being answered by his mate who was across the road, also fossicking for food. This little performance continued for some time with my curiosity fully aroused. The sharp lapwing calls continued and I could not fathom the reason for this unusual behaviour until I looked towards the road, and there, marching up the centre of the road were their babies: two Chinese-like miniatures. Having found all the goodies they could on our block the whole family then turned around and marched down the centre of the road towards Castlemaine. It almost seemed that the proud parents had brought the children to our home to show them off!

Etc.

The wildflowers are gradually fading although there are still hundreds of yellow everlastings scattered through our block. Each year they appear to multiply. It always seems a sad time when the realization occurs that Spring has passed for another year.

The kangaroos, which normally come onto our front lawn about this time each year, are yet to appear, so there must be an ample supply of green fodder still available in the surrounding forest and paddocks.

While our wattlebirds were late nesting this year they have now fledged and recently presented their young to Jacqui for approval. (John also told me that the wattlebirds seem to have a short truce and a gossip in the evening when they all go down to drink and bathe at the dam. Ed.)

John Turnbull

Mainly Mannum

A sudden decision to visit friends who live a few miles north of Mannum in South Australia proved to be the source of much delight. We travelled to Horsham via Dunolly, St Arnaud, and Rupanyup (it's about 6 km shorter than through Ararat!). From there we headed west to Goroke and Frances, calling at the Jane Duff Memorial Park for afternoon tea. As we pulled up we frightened a four foot goanna up a tree and a pair of Noisy Miners harrassed the poor thing the whole time we were there. I would have loved to have had time to explore as there were quite a few flowers out, including Peach Heath and Bluebells, and there were lots of birds that I didn't have time to identify.

From Frances were headed north to Bordertown - quite a lot of the roadside is Banksia scrub - and stayed overnight at Keith.

Next day at our morning tea spot just west of Yukara we found ourselves parked next to a Blackfaced Cuckoo-shrikes' nest, but we would never have known it if one of the parents hadn't flown in to feed the young one(s). The nest was about 2.5 m above the ground and only looked like a wad of fluff on the horizontal fork of the mallee.

We had decided at Keith that we would stay for three nights at Mannum, and visit our friends from there. I'd recommend the area to anyone. Next to the Caravan Park is a small bird sanctuary on one side and the ferries on the other. In the Caravan Park and on our walk along the edge of the river in the sanctuary we identified a total of thirty two species, including Whistling Kites, Pelicans, Clamorous Reed-warblers, Little Grassbird, and a family of ducks, which I suspect were Mallard X, which started as a clutch of twelve in the morning and finished the day as a clutch of four. I tended to blame the Pelicans, but the Park manager said no, the worst culprits in the Park were the Swamp Hens. Apparantly they just love a young duckling for lunch!

I got up at 6.15 next morning and went on the walk up to the cliff-top lookout. We'd been going the day before but it was much too

hot - about 33°C, and I badly wanted to climb up to the top to see the river from there. Again I saw lots of birds and added Black Kites and dozens of Goldfinches to my list, along with Singing Honeyeater and Black-tailed Native Hens.

Later that day we went for a drive along the river upstream of Mannum. There were lots of tiny fishing communities (weekenders) along the river, but few were named. We stopped several times, and were amazed at the size of the tortoises sunning themselves on the other side of the billabong. Some must have been at least 45cm in diameter. At one spot, while we were admiring Bee-eaters, we spotted three Little Eagles - a pale phase, a very dark phase and one in between. I took a slide of them. It's hardly top class bird photography, but at least it shows the difference. At Younghusband, which is a slightly bigger community, there where several houses which looked a bit better than the usual huts, and one had a garden with a hedge. That night on Burke's Backyard we saw the house, and the reason for showing it was the hedge - it was made of rosemary bushes. The gardeners had chosen plants that would handle the climate and would look after themselves during the week, and it was in very strong contrast to most of the huts, which were very much "she'll-be-right-mate" places.

Driving between Younghusband and Purnong, away from and high above the river gives a real "out-back" feeling as the rainfall is low and the vegetation is mostly scrub and native grasses, but near Bow Hill there are vines and lucerne, irrigated from the river using pumps and spray irrigation.

We crossed back over the river on the ferry at Purnong. It was very hot and we didn't really feel like exploring further, but there are some interesting looking tracks down to the river on that side, too. Where we crossed the river at Purnong we weren't really very far from Walker Flat and Shell Hill which I mentioned in the C.N. a couple of months ago.

The country was actually looking in good condition as there had been a storm and rain through about a week before we were there, but when we did find flowers they were often quite small compared with what would be normal. Numbers of birds were seen, but out in the scrub we had no hope of identifying something that shot out of the bushes and promptly dived back in again, but there were many to be seen along the river.

We left next morning, planning to take the same route home. At our morning tea spot not far from where we turned towards Keith there were few birds, but the ones we saw were a pair of Cockatiel which

perched over our heads, some White-browed Woodswallows nearby, and three Blue-bonnets which flew away as we left the spot. The only other birds were a pair of Willie Wagtails, some ravens and a pair of Galahs!

Just before Keith we decided to take the road down to Naracoorte. I needed a rest and we finally found a place to park, and it happed to be the car park for Christmas Rocks, a granite outcrop I had read about when were were at Keith on the way over. After a nap we climbed to the top for a wonderful view over the plains. There were quite a few birds around and lots of flowers which were quite different from what we had been seeing, and included a Thomasia sp., Hop Goodenia, Fringe Myrtle, onion orchids, Magenta Storksbill and a wattle with very fine philodes. Further back we had been seeing things like little grass trees, croweas, Desert Phebalium and some mallees in flower.

When we got to Narracoorte I had a look at the information in the motel folder and realized that it was only about 20km down the road to Bool Lagoon so, of course, next morning was spent there. I made a list of 38 species, including nesting Royal Spoonbills and Sacred Kingfishers, which we saw at the Paperbark Boardwalk hide - in company with about 12 Cubs and their leaders!- both Stilts, Little and Greater Egrets, Chestnut Teal, Swamp Hens, Clamourous Reedwarbler, Little Grassbird, and, I thought, a Golden Headed Cisticola briefly. Lesley Perkins tells me they saw one at the same spot, so can I claim that one too?

I always recommend the minor roads. They usually are treed, and therefore cooler, have more birds, and are generally quieter, and there's more often spots where you can pull off and explore. Husband Doug often teases me about my short cuts, but what if they are further if they are more interesting?

Rita Mills

Gower School Bird List, 5 - 6.30pm 4/11/97

Noisy Miner
Galah
White-winged Chough (nest with 2 young)
Magpie
Red Wattlebird
Fuscous Honeyeater
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Welcome Swallow
Straw-necked Ibis (paddock alongside)
Peaceful Dove (not observed there before)
Eastern Rosella
Whistling Kite
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Olive-backed Oriole
White-browed Woodswallows
Australian Raven
Grey Shrike-thrush
Magpielark
Sacred Kingfisher x2
Brown Treecreeper
Kookaburra

Phillip West

Observations

* Margaret Willis reported that husband Brian had been attacked by a pair of Moorhens at the Botanical Gardens when he got a bit close to the young ones hidden under a willow. They came flying straight at his face. Last year George Broadway reported a similar incident.
* George reported that a hawk, identity unknown, in a garden at the back of Gingell St. was seen eating a Blackbird, and later a Silvereye. The flock of Silvereyes retaliated and chased it and it hasn't been seen since!
* Natalie de Macchus then added that Choughs at her place were chasing the Kangaroos.
* At Harcourt Brenda Envall found that it was a Black-shouldered Kite being swooped by Magpies.
* Margaret Badminton has a pair of Tawny Frogmouths nesting near her place at Yapeen.
* Indian Mynahs were preventing Galahs from nesting at Goldsmiths Cresent. Ern Perkins. The same problem is still occuring at North Castlemaine, even though the Mynahs stay away from the tree for days at a time. Rita Mills
* When Frank Duffin was up at Mildura a short while ago the river water was green and there were 100's of small fish dead. Over 5000 Silver Gulls were there for the feast along with 20 White-breasted Sea-eagles as well as Whistling Kites, ravens etc.
* Stewart Morris was taken out to seen the Flying Duck Orchids at Middletons Creek, and reported that there were also many Beard Orchids in bud.
* Margaret Hunter has Rainbow Bee-eaters nesting at the back of the house at Faraday for the first time, and also an Azure Kingfisher has taken up residence near the house.
* Ken and Maureen Dredge reported that the White-browed Woodswallows are back at Muckleford.
* Rita Mills reports that son-in-law Bryan has found that its not a good idea to take the dog for a walk too close to where Peregrine Falcons are nesting at Moyston. The falcon attacked him and actually raised a lump on his head.
* Barbara Maund is having Starling trouble. They've found great places to roost at her place and are leaving calling cards. She wants to know - how do you get rid of Starlings!!??
* Ken Dredge went out to the Castlemaine Golf Course to check the truth about two families of Grey-crowned Babblers being there, but after he found the first family of three while the green keeper checked the other place that they have been seen they had to come to the conclusion it is the same family, and that their territory takes in both sides of the road. Maureen was also able to report that more honeyeaters are using their garden as the shrubs mature.
*Brenda Envall reported an incident told to her by a friend. He had

seen a pair of Ibis trying to take off at the Castlemaine Tip, but found that the reason they couldn't get off the ground was that they had fishing line tangled on a leg on one and a wing on the other. He managed to catch them and take them home and succeeded in getting the line cut off. He then put them in the fowl pen. The one with the line on its leg only stayed a night, but the other one stayed for a week. They still come back for an occasional visit!

* Brenda, and Margaret Willis are both enjoying having Rufous Whistlers calling around their houses.

* Maggie Oliver tells us about all she has at home at the moment are Goldfinches.

* Margaret Hunter is finding that many birds are coming to their birdbath, including the Yellow-tufted, White-eared, and White-naped honeyeaters, as well as pardalotes.

* Lorraine Rye has seen the lone pair of nesting Black-winged Stilts at Port Fairy, at the Swamp near Griffiths Island on Ocean Drive. There is now a bird hide on the swamp.

Have you seen Australian Bustards in the district?

A visitor reported seeing, from the Maldon steam train, a bird which he is convinced, after referring to his bird book, and mine, was a Bustard, near the big dam not far from the south side of the line near Muckleford station. This is the second report of Bustards seen in the district in about 12 months, and really should be checked out, so keep your eyes open! Simpson and Day shows that they can be down this way.

Rita Mills

Barfold Gorge

Last month Stephanie Bell from the Barfold Gorge committee was invited to tell us something of their battle to save the Gorge from the proposed quarry nearby. This month during the meeting a video of the Gorge itself, will be shown to demonstrate why it it worth preserving - apart from the fact it is one of only three sites in the world where three separate lava flows can be observed, so it is rather unique.

Most of us will be aware of the problems through the local newspapers and the committee is asking for us to support them by contacting our local councillors, and state and federal polititians and voicing our concern also by donating goods for a clearing sale in Kyneton in early Feb., or donating money, to help fund their case before the AAT in mid Feb.. Pickup of goods will be arranged. Also they are asking that we add our voice to the request that the unused Government Road allotment from the Kyneton /Redesdale road down to the Gorge (06/9257 Felice Trovatello and 06/1149 W.L.Adams care of L. Bourke) be re-opened. Apparantly Council *is* now interested, but need backing.

Also they are requesting that people ask the council to have the area around the Gorge re-zoned from Rural to Environmental Rural. This should be easily be done, according to Ann Littlejohn, as the whole state is currently undergoing re-zoning.

For further information, contact Ann Littlejohn on 5423 4215, or Stephanie Bell on 5425 3171

C . F . N . C . PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church Hall. The entrance to car park is behind the Art Gallery, Lyttleton Street.

Fri Dec 12. **Members' and visitors' night.** You are invited to contribute to a segment of the program. Give a short (5 or 10 minutes) talk, or show some slides (about a dozen) or bring specimens, or discuss some other aspect of natural history. Please bring a plate of supper.

Sat Dec 13 **Tullaroop Reservoir.** Time to be decided at Dec. Meeting. This will depend on temperature, and could be early or late afternoon. Meet at CHIRP 13 Mostyn St.

Sat Jan 10 **Dawn Breakfast, Tullaroop.** Either meet early and leave 15 Gaulton St. at 5 **am** or, if that's too much for the system, make your own way and meet at the lawned Picnic area just over the spillway. Bring binocs, bird book and breakfast. Leader is M. Oliver.

Fri Feb 13 **Annual Meeting. Wildlife Corridors.** Speaker, David James of Guildford. 8pm, UCA hall.

Fri 6 to Mon 9 March – **VFNCA campout at Marysville.** A broad outline is given on P 7 of the Oct (#238) Castlemaine Naturalist. Further details from the Secretary.

Fri March 13 **Birding in Moyston.** Speaker Simon Kennedy. UCA hall 8pm

* NB The April meeting will be on Fri 3rd to avoid Good Friday, depending on the availability of the hall. There will be no meeting on Good Friday.

Sat April 4. In conjunction with the Herritage Week program, the Field Nats will conduct a walk on the **Pennyweight Flat/Kalimna Walking Trail.** A light afternoon tea will be served at Kalimna rotunda, and a small charge will be made. Time will be from 1.30pm til about 4.15,in a circuit from Victory Park and back. Details to be finalised.

Fri 11 to Sun 12 Sept. **Field Naturalists Get–together at Castlemaine.**

Fri 16 to Sun 18 Oct. **V.F.N.C.A. campout at Mildura.**

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Elections for Committee come up in February. Enclosed in this issue is a nomination form for your use. Secretary has extra forms.

Present Committee G Groadway (Pres.), M. Willis (V.P.), M.Oliver (Sec), B. Envall (Treas), C. Morris, K. Turner, R. Mills (P.O. & C.N. Ed.), E. Perkins, B. Maund, M Dredge, and J Turnbull.

Meetings

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St. at 8.00pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions 1997 - Ordinary Membership: Single $16 Family $24
Pensioner/Student: Single $12 Family $18. Supporting $25

Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.
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